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INL invites industry, academia to partner in nuclear research

IDAHO FALLS -- From June 1 to June 5, the U.S. Department of Energy's Idaho National Laboratory will host a National Scientific User Facility "User's Week." Students and faculty from universities across the nation, representatives from industry and other experts in nuclear power will converge at INL's Advanced Test Reactor for the week.

Although seven universities are already involved in research related to the Advanced Test Reactor, the facility is looking to encourage even more teamwork among academic researchers, industry experts and government.

"I'm excited to have high caliber people come into town to share their knowledge and collaborate," said Jeff Benson, ATR NSUF Education Program coordinator. "The goal of ATR User's Week is to educate people on the capabilities for nuclear research that exist at INL and are offered to researchers through the ATR NSUF."

The event has three main goals beyond giving students, faculty and researchers the chance to network:

Inform potential users of capabilities of both tools and facilities they can access through the ATR NSUF to advance nuclear science and technology,

Provide a forum for researchers to discuss nuclear technology issues, and

Educate and involve students in current issues involving nuclear science.

Classes, tours, presentations and hands-on experiments will help meet these goals. The topics they'll be discussing will include current materials and fuels research. Current university tests sponsored by the ATR NSUF study the effects of irradiation on materials used in reactors.

Results of these tests could help researchers predict the behavior of materials used in reactors and lead to even better reactor designs and longer plant lives. Americans receive roughly 20 percent of their electricity from nuclear power, a carbon-free source. The financial benefits of nuclear reactor advances would be significant since they would allow current plants to operate longer without needing to be replaced by new constructions.

As an investment in the future of nuclear research, INL has awarded 50 travel scholarships to university students and faculty from universities across the country to attend the course. The scholarships were awarded based on a competitive application submitted by students and faculty. The scholarships cover all the costs associated with attending User's Week.

One of the primary goals of the User Facility is to encourage teamwork among academic researchers, industry experts and government entities that lead to outstanding ideas for scientific experiments.

Benson said he hopes the User's Week will increase collaboration and teamwork among university nuclear science students and faculty, industry specialists and INL. Partnerships between academia, industry and the government will be key, he believes, to helping promote important advances in the nuclear field and ultimately, benefitting the public.

INL is one of the DOE's 10 multi-program national laboratories. The laboratory performs work in each of the strategic goal areas of DOE: energy, national security, science and environment. INL is the nation's leading center for nuclear energy research and development. Day-to-day management and operation of the laboratory is the responsibility of Battelle Energy Alliance.

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